

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## EHB 1571

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As of February 19, 2018

**Title:** An act relating to creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans.

**Brief Description:** Creating a community care and supportive services program for veterans.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Reeves, Muri, Ryu, Kilduff, Sawyer, Steele, Macri, Orwall, Tharinger, Chapman, Stanford, Doglio, Fey, Hudgins, Stonier, Frame, Kloba, Springer, Walsh, McBride, Ortiz-Self, Riccelli and Slatter.

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/01/17, 98-0; 5/02/17, 92-0; 5/25/17, 94-0; 1/18/18, 96-0.

**Committee Activity:** State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 2/16/18.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a pilot program to help veterans in rural and remote areas access benefits and services.

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

**Staff:** Melissa Van Gorkom (786-7491)

**Background:** Benefits and services for military veterans are provided at the federal, local, and state levels. The federal government provides military veterans with a variety of federal benefits including disability compensation, education and training, employment services, health care, home loans, life insurance, and pensions. The federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administers many of these benefit programs and provides resources for veterans to access and obtain these benefits.

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) administers veterans' benefits provided by the state, including the Veterans Assistance Program, Veterans Innovations Program, State Veterans Homes, and several housing assistance programs.

Each county is authorized to establish a veterans assistance program (VAP) to provide services for indigent veterans and their families. Counties have authority to levy a special tax

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that provides revenue for the VAP through a veterans assistance fund. The county may delegate VAP administration to another entity through a grant, contract, or interlocal agreement. The county must establish a veterans advisory board to provide recommendations on the VAP.

**Summary of Bill:** Pilot Program. A veterans community care and supportive services pilot program is established. WDVA must select one county VAP or community partner to administer the pilot program by January 1, 2019, with the pilot program expiring on July 1, 2021. A community partner includes any nationally recognized veterans service group with a chapter in the state, or other established organization that provides veteran services.

The pilot program must provide assistance for veterans and their families who reside in a rural or remote area of the state. The program administrator should be selected based on the access to veteran resources in the county, the management capabilities of the VAP or community partner, and the projected ability of the program to increase access to services for veterans in the county. The program must provide assistance to increase access to federal veterans benefits, reintegration services, and other public services, including the following:

- coordinating with the VA and other federal agencies in obtaining health care, employment, educational, vocational, and rehabilitation services;
- coordinating with other public agencies in obtaining services related to mental health, substance abuse, counseling, domestic violence, family services, and transportation; and
- providing direct services by the county or community partner that are otherwise unavailable to address veterans particular needs.

Report to the Legislature. By December 1, 2020, WDVA must prepare and submit a report to the Legislature that evaluates the pilot program and makes recommendations whether the program should be continued or expanded. The report must include the number of persons served, the types of outreach and referrals made, and the availability of resources within the county.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: There is a strong need for the passage of this bill. These efforts will support Veterans who need help.

OTHER: The main purpose of this program is to secure benefits and entitlements for veterans, a process that is very similar to doing taxes, by providing assistance with the paperwork necessary for these individuals to receive these benefits. This process works and we hope to touch the lives of vets that need this support.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Kristine Reeves, Prime Sponsor, Jerry Fugich, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

OTHER: Mary Forbes, Assistant Director, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.